

## Cross-Culture Translation-Taking Cao Yu's Chinese Version as an Example

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### Abstract

Shakespeare's drama *Romeo and Juliet* is considered as a classical interpretation of love. Cao Yu's Chinese version is successful for stage performance due to its unique features. Based on drama's literary feature and performative function, this thesis attempts to make analysis of Cao Yu's Chinese version according to Skopos Theory, Reception Theory and Functional Equivalence Theory. To sum up, taking stage performance and audience acceptance as the main focus, Cao Yu successfully achieved the functional equivalence of the original text.

**Key words:** Cross-culture translation; Cao Yu; *Romeo and Juliet*

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### INTRODUCTION

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cao Yu is well-known as the most remarkable of the modern Chinese dramatists, his unique translation of *Romeo and Juliet* also gains large popularity and arouses critics' attentions due to its successful preservation of cultural images and literary functions of the source text. However, till now there is no research which particularly focus on translation methods and strategies of Cao Yu's version, therefore, it is necessary to analyze his unique translation strategies and methods. This thesis aims to make analysis of translation strategies Cao

Yu has used which makes this version as the best stage-oriented one. Cao Yu's experience in drama translation deserves the reference for future translation. We can draw the conclusion that Cao Yu is not only a great dramatist but also a prosperous translator.

### 1. TRANSLATION OF PUN

Generally speaking, the word pun is interpreted as

the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989).

On the one hand, a pun may be composed of several words with similar spelling or pronunciation but their meanings may not be connected. On the other hand, a pun may also be one word used in different places with different meanings. Due to its flexibility, there are few restrictions in punning translation. Most translators prefer to devise a pun on the basis of the original one because they bear traditional translation theories in mind which require equivalence both in form and meaning. Few translators will try to create a completely new pun which has few direct relations with the original one. In fact, unless a readily available pun that exists in target language which suits the context, it is very difficult for a translator to put forward a completely new pun without any hints.

Shakespeare is a master in literature in the world. The charm of his language is the use of different types of rhetoric devices, among which pun is a very important one. It is evaluated that he used more than 3,000 puns in his works.

#### Example 1

Tybalt: Mercutio, thou consort est with Romeo—  
Mercutio: Consort! What, dost thou make us minstrels?  
And thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing

but discords. Here' my fiddlestick, here's  
that shall  
make you dance. 'Zounds, consort!  
(Cao, 2002)

The word "consort" has two meanings. One is "to keep company with, associate", the other is "troupe of hired musicians or minstrels". Tybalt always stirs up trouble and he uses an ambiguous word in order to tease and tantalize Mercutio. Being reluctant to show weakness, Mercutio intelligently repeated the word to take up the challenge. The translator should take this element into consideration when he puts the pun into Chinese. That is to say, if he wants to create a new pun to take the place of the original one, the meaning of pun ought to be placed on the word of Tybalt rather than Mercutio's. In addition, the word "consort" has appeared twice in Mercutio's utterance. It has the same meaning and should be translated with one single word. Cao Yu translates "consort" into "yī chàng yī hē" (Chinese phonetic alphabets) in three places which successfully match the original pun both in form and meaning. Obviously, he employs domestication here. According to *A Modern Chinese-English Dictionary*, "yī chàng yī hē" (Ditto) has the meaning of "to sing a duet with somebody; to sing the same tune; to echo each other". As a matter of fact, "yī chàng yī hē" (Ditto) is, nowadays, also regarded as pun itself in Chinese. The first "consort" in Tybalt's line obviously shows the implication that in his eyes, Mercutio and Romeo are a bird of the same feather, they echo each other. Cao Yu successfully translates "consort" into "yī chàng yī hē" (Ditto) which is related to minstrels so as to arouse Mercutio to such anger. However, the last two "consort" made by Mercutio originally means singing with melody which shows his misunderstandings of Tybalt's word. Cao Yu still translates "consort" into "yī chàng yī hē" (Ditto) to indicate its original meaning which equals to original pun. Meanwhile, the word "yī chàng yī hē" (Ditto) is comparatively colloquial and short which also leaves enough space for actors to interpret.

Eugene A. Nida points out that "Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." (Nida & Taber, 2004) His Functional Equivalence Theory states that translation should try to find the closest possible equivalent in both form and content (Nida, 1969). Nida argues that there are two different types of equivalence namely formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal correspondence "focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content", whereas dynamic equivalence is based upon "the principle of equivalent effect." (Nida, 1964)

During the past fifty years, however, there has been a marked shift of emphasis from the formal to the dynamic dimension. A recent summary of opinion on translating by literary artists,

publishers, educators, and professional translator indicates clearly that the present direction is toward increasing emphasis on dynamic equivalence. (Nida & Taber, 2004)

Owing to the difference in culture and language, completely perfect equivalence in translation is almost impossible. Translation should seek to reach the closest natural equivalent to the source-language. In other words, translation should sound natural and be easy for the target readers to understand. The maximal effectiveness is that the way the original readers understood and appreciated the text equals to that of target readers. Cao Yu's translation undoubtedly reaches the maximal effectiveness of Functional Equivalence because audience can easily and naturally understand double meanings of the pun.

#### Example 2

Mercutio: If love be rough with you, be rough with love;  
Prick love for pricking, and you beat love  
down.  
Give me a case to put my visage in:  
A visor for a visor! What care I  
What curious eye doth quote deformities?  
Here are the beetle-brows shall blush for me.  
(Cao, 2002)

"Visage" and "visor" mean a surface that protects the eyes. They also have the meaning of concealment or in disguise. In this scene, Mercutio, Romeo with five other masques are discussing whether to attend the masque. When Mercutio takes a visor, he is willing to cover his face with a visor indicating he is not good looking. The pun successfully arouses readers' interests and highlights the character's personality. According to Skopos Theory, it focuses on translation as an activity with an aim or purpose, and on the intended addressee or audience of translation. To translate means to produce a target text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances (Venuti, 2004).

Based on action theory, communication theory, the Skopos Theory is an approach to translation which was developed in Germany in the late 1970s, and which reflects a general shift from predominantly linguistic and rather formal translation theories to a more functional and sociocultural oriented concept of translation. The Skopos Theory got its name from the Greek word "Skopos" which means "purpose" and was introduced into translation theory by Hans J. Vermeer as a technical term for the purpose of a translation and of the action of translating. This approach to translation stresses the purpose of the translation, which determines the translation strategies to be adopted. As the core of the functionalist translation theory, Skopos Theory has managed to provide a detailed analysis on the decisive factors determining the translation process.

An offer of information in a language t of the culture T, which imitates an offer of information in a language s of the culture S according to words or sentences from one language into

another, but a complex form of action in which someone gives information about a text [source language material] under new functional, cultural and linguistic conditions and in a new situation, while preserving formal aspects as far as possible. (Hornby, 2006)

In Skopos Theory, Hans Vermeer claims that it is the purpose of the target text that determines the function of the translational action. Cao Yu keeps firmly in his mind that to win the recognition of the audience is his aim of translation. Therefore, he uses a typical Chinese pun “guǐ liǎn” (Chinese phonetic alphabets) to replace the original one “visor”. “guǐ liǎn” (Ditto), in Chinese, it means ugly or hypocritical face. It also refers to some kind of face masks imitating figures in the play. As native Chinese audience, it is easy to understand the literal and implied meaning of this pun. The repetition of “guǐ liǎn” (Ditto) shares two different meanings. The first and the third one refer to face mask while the second one indicates his own face. The use of an available pun in target language not only meets the requirement of local adaption but also maintains the effect of pun in the original text.

## 2. TRANSLATION OF CULTURALLY-LOADED WORDS

Culturally-loaded words refer to words or phrases which convey a certain kind of cultural connotations or associations which may or may not be found in other languages or cultures. Different from common words, culturally-loaded ones reflect the native cultural factors. How to minimize the strangeness between the original culture and target culture is a big problem that translator should take into consideration while translating.

Language can never be separated from their cultural backgrounds, and it is the same with their translation. So culture is the first factor that should always be borne in mind.

It is said that translation is unity of two cultures. Because of cultural differences, equivalents are sometimes difficult to find, and the loss of message often unavoidably occurs. All those who learn foreign languages must study the corresponding cultures as well since the two can never be separated. Language can be looked upon as a tree rooted in the soil of culture. Different cultures may share some similarities, which are the basis for cultural exchange; and the differences are usually the obstacles for communication. It is proved that people's attitudes toward nature and the ways of thinking are strongly influenced by their deep-set cultures. Different words or characters may arouse different images.

### Example 3

Romeo: Well, in that hit you miss. She'll not be hit  
 With Cupid's arrow: She hath Dian's wit.  
 (Cao, 2002)

According to Reception Theory, a translator should consider his readers' horizon of expectation during the

process of practical translation. “Horizon of expectation” is a component of Jauss's theory of literary history where his intention is to minimize the gulf between the schools of literature and history which have previously relegated the reader to play only a minor role in the interpretation of literature (Jauss, 1970). It emphasizes the reader as an important element in the processing of texts. According to Jauss, the reader approaches a text armed with the knowledge and experience gained from interactions with other texts. These earlier texts arouse familiarity for the reader based on expectations and rules of genre and style. In order to establish a good relationship with receptors of target text, the translator should seek to know what his receptors expect from the version generally.

Generally speaking, drama translation has two kinds of receptors: readers and audience. Taking Liang Shiqiu's and Cao Yu's versions of *Romeo and Juliet* as the example, the former translation was just required to meet the need of reading for readers while the latter one was aimed as a stage-oriented play script.

For common literature, a translator might try his best to remain an exotic atmosphere so that readers can have the opportunity to get in touch with other culture for the sake of renovating their former expectation. They appreciate the illusory beauty of the works with their horizon of expectation and intoxicate themselves in their own world. The readers are likely to be more tolerant, because they can have enough time to think over and savor the works, they can sweep away almost all barriers in their reading by consulting other people, reference books, or even Internet. So in publication-centered version, such as Zhu Shenghao's version, he added some footnotes for the sake of providing some assistance for reader's understanding.

Cao Yu's version is stage-oriented, his receptors are audience. It is impossible for audience to have enough time to think over or to consult reference books when confronting some culturally-loaded words. Ordinary words are preferable.

Cupid was the son of Venus (goddess of love) and Mars (god of war) in Roman mythology. He himself (Latin Cupid, meaning “desire”) is the god of desire, affection and love. Cupids are a frequent motif of both Roman art and later Western art of the classical tradition. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the iconography of Cupid starts to become indistinguishable from the putto. Cupid continued to be a popular figure in the Middle Ages, when under Christian influence he often had a dual nature as Heavenly and Earthly love. In the Renaissance, a renewed interest in classical philosophy endowed him with complex allegorical meanings. In contemporary popular culture, Cupid is shown drawing his bow to inspire romantic love, often as an icon of Valentine's Day. It is known that Cupid is a synonym for love.

Dian, refers to Dian Cecht who is the God of healing in Irish mythology. It was Dian Cecht who once

saved Ireland with his intelligence. He is a symbol of wisdom.

But in early 1970s', it is difficult for Chinese audience to understand the connotative and symbolic meaning of Cupid and Dian in Shakespeare's plays. Considering native reader's taste and comprehension, Cao Yu uses free translation.

Instead of deleting or adding content to the original sentences, Cao Yu considers the original carefully, knows its stress, translates it naturally, expresses the meaning of the original. He chooses the word "ài qíng" (Chinese phonetic alphabets) to meet Chinese readers' taste. We can't deny this kind of translation should be appropriate and reasonable in his time.

### 3. TRANSLATION OF VULGAR WORDS

Vulgar word is commonly considered as rude and offending language. People who speak vulgar words are usually regarded as impolite and uneducated. As a matter of fact, vulgar word is a practical way people express their special feelings and mood. However, vulgar words have always been neglected by researchers due to some moral or cultural reasons, let alone its translation. Facing translation of vulgar words, translators usually either avoid translating it or purifying it. But as a typical linguistic phenomenon, vulgar words play an indispensable role in dialogues. Shakespeare handles vulgar words skillfully. It is considered that vulgar language is one of the chief linguistic features of his works. It not only reflects one aspect of the characteristics of Shakespeare's time, but also plays a significant role in dramatic language. It is of great help to present the characters, motivate the development of plot, highlight and punctuate the stage action. Therefore, translation of vulgar words is of great importance in drama translation and it is undoubtedly a big challenge for all translators. If translating the vulgar words improperly, we may not convey speaker's emotion correctly which even cause some misunderstandings. Or if we avoid translating them, the textual style will not be completed. Therefore, appropriate methods and strategies are needed. Only in this way can we successfully describe characters' personality vividly and authentically.

Cao Yu, due to his profound knowledge of Chinese culture and Western cultures, eliminated a lot of barriers, making his version a masterpiece.

#### Example 4

Benvolio: She will invite him to some supper.

Mercutio: A bawd, a bawd, a bawd! So ho!

(Cao, 2002)

The word "Bawd" means a woman who engages in sexual intercourse for money. Cao Yu directly translates it into "lā pí tiáo de" (Chinese phonetic alphabets) which not only is faithful to its original meaning but also suits stage effect. As native Chinese audience, they will have no difficulty in understanding "lā pí tiáo de" (Ditto).

Generally, it refers to a person who acts as a procurer or as a pimp which is commonly used in Chinese vulgar language. According to Reception Aesthetics Theory, besides the present audience, actors and actresses are also regarded as the receptors of drama translation. They play a crucial role in the success of the drama. So intelligent translators always take this element into consideration. In this example, Cao Yu repeats "lā pí tiáo de" (Ditto) twice instead of three times as original text, because in Chinese dialogues, the same words repeated twice in one sentence suggests emphasis and it obeys Chinese language rules, so it is easily spoken and performed by actors. In addition, words repetition can provide actors and actresses enough time and space to change their voice, tone and some necessary actions. In this way, wonderful performance is presented. Feedback of the audience come back to the actors at the moment of the performance, actors will be encouraged by the positive response which ensures the accomplishment of the performance.

To sum up, vulgar words in *Romeo and Juliet* are successfully translated by Cao Yu. Generally speaking, Cao Yu uses literal translation and free translation respectively for the sake of being faithful to the original content as much as possible. He employs appropriate Chinese and succeeds in sparking an echo from audience.

### CONCLUSION

Cao Yu is regarded as an outstanding playwright in the field of modern Chinese literature. His Chinese version of *Romeo and Juliet* is also considered to be the most successful edition for stage performance. It is obvious that his version is successfully and widely accepted by both readers and scholars. However, he, as a translator did not get the deserved treatment honorably matching with his achievements. Although in recent years, his rendition is often quoted in some thesis for Master's degree and Doctor's degree, his proper identity, status, achievements and contribution has less or even never been displayed profoundly. Therefore, this thesis is an attempt to study Cao Yu's translation thoughts and practice, which aims to answer why Cao Yu should be deserved as a master of translation.

We can draw the conclusions as follows:

Firstly, drama, different from other literary genre, is meant to be performed on the stage. In order to meet audience's needs, Cao Yu successfully adopts different strategies and methods accordingly. Since his receptors are Chinese actors and audience, Cao Yu mainly employs domestication translation strategy. In translation of pun, culturally-loaded words and vulgar words, he chooses literal translation, free translation and transliteration respectively when necessary. Since his version is oriented for stage performance, Cao Yu uses dramatic language which is more concise and colloquial. Therefore, his rendition is regarded as acceptable and successful one.

Secondly, for the sake of helping actors to understand drama easily, Cao Yu adds proper action notes and stage descriptions. Acting notes successfully supply assistance to actors on stage by describing motions, postures and facial expressions. Stage descriptions provide brief introduction for the stage design. Both action notes and stage descriptions undoubtedly become a unique feature of Cao Yu's version as it is beneficial to the actor's better performance and audience's better understanding.

In the preface of Cao Yu's version, he mentioned the shortcoming in his translation.

First, I'm afraid the audience can't understand the meaning of the play, so that I add some of my own explanation, which doesn't exist in the original text. Second, I also add some rhymes to make this drama be more poetic, while the original play was written in iambic pentameter without rhymes. (Cao, 2002)

However, it is the distinctiveness of Cao's version. Maybe when Cao Yu translated this drama, like writing a drama before, he put all his countless passion into the lines, so that the reader can enjoy the beauty of art.

Thirdly, Cao Yu flexibly translates Shakespeare's works in the form of blank verse which keeps the original exotic atmosphere of the play. Though in Chinese language, there is no literary form which is equivalent to blank verse, Cao Yu boldly attempts to remain its original form and wins a great success.

All in all, Cao Yu's version is more faithful to the play as far as the style and the effect of the target text are concerned. It is a successful combination of formal and spiritual resemblance. Therefore, Cao Yu, as a great translator, should win more and more respect and study, which is matched with his achievements and contribution.

Because of the difficulty of translation and relatively inadequate knowledge of the author, the thesis is far from perfect in many aspects, so there must have much room left for improvement. Since this version is regarded as a typical and successful one for stage performance, the author hopes this thesis can serve as a stepping stone for the long march to studying Cao Yu's translation. More and more researches focused on his translation strategies and methods should be made and his successful experience could be adopted in future drama translation.

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